

CHAPTER I

REVOLUTION AND
RETRENCHMENT

Illuminating the Present in Latin America

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THIS VOLUME EXAMINES THE WAYS IN which Latin America, during the last decade, has become a global laboratory. There, new forms of governance, economic structuring, and social mobilization are responding to and at times challenging the continuing hegemony of what the anthropologist James Ferguson (2006) describes as the “neoliberal world order.” Yet despite the fact that political leaders in countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela articulate these responses in the language of revolution, these most radical of regional experiments remain outliers, the exceptions that prove the general rule that the global consolidation of late capitalism through neoliberalism has been merely, if revealingly, interrupted in Latin America. Nevertheless, we argue that these interruptions have important consequences and reveal new horizons of possibility—social, political, economic, theoretical—within a broader, post-Cold War world in which many of the traditional alternatives

to late capitalism and neoliberal forms of governance have lost ideological legitimacy and in which even the idea of revolution itself—with its mythological invocations of radical change, righteous violence, and social and moral renewal—is often seen as an anachronism.

At the same time, we also examine the problem of widespread retrenchment of neoliberalism in Latin America, a set of processes that both brings into starker contrast the significance of the exceptional challenges to neoliberalism and underscores the ways in which neoliberal forms of governance and social life have become ideologically detached from their historical contingencies. Without the ever-present specter of the Cold War looming over ongoing struggles over land, racism, and political marginalization, it has become more difficult for social and political radicals in Latin America to bring home the point that the assumptions and structures that perpetuate different forms of inequality are not inevitable. Indeed, as we will see, neoliberal governmentality in Latin America is as naturalizing as elsewhere. Even the most robust and earnest provocations of the conditions that produce vulnerability come up against the lingering effects of the Washington Consensus in Latin America, through which regional political economies came into a forced alignment around market democratization, the withdrawal of the state from service sectors, trade liberalization, and the codification of a high-liberal property-rights regime that extended legal inequalities into new areas like intellectual property and biogenetics (see, e.g., Dezalay and Garth 2002; Oxhorn and Ducatenzeiler 1998).

If in its broadest reach our volume is a critical study of one slice of the contemporary life of neoliberalism in Latin America, it is perhaps not surprising that we have chosen to bring together a diverse group of scholars and intellectuals, both Latin American and Latin Americanist, who present a range of disciplinary, regional, and theoretical perspectives. *Neoliberalism, Interrupted* revolves around case studies of the everyday lives of people and their institutions, caught up in moments of social change and processes of contested governance. The volume's perspectives move between the grounded experiences of neoliberalism in Latin America and more synthetic reflections on meaning, consequence, and the possibility of regional responses to neoliberal hegemony and the articulation of formal alternatives to it. These perspectives are enriched by the critical voices of several prominent Latin American

researchers and writers, one of whom (the Venezuelan sociologist Miguel Ángel Contreras Natera), in a provocative postscript to the volume, productively obscures the line between politics and scholarship, manifesto and intellectual inspiration, in a full-throated and deeply theorized plea for a new kind of politics in Latin America.

Taken together, the different critical studies in the volume demonstrate the ways in which the history and politics of contemporary Latin America carry important lessons for scholars, activists, and political leaders in other parts of world with similar histories and structural conditions, including legacies of extractive colonialism and neocolonialism, the influence of Cold War proxyism, interethnic conflict, strong regional identity, and traditions of institutional instability. In this way, the volume adds its collective voice to a growing debate on the meaning and significance of responses to neoliberalism in Latin America and beyond (see, e.g., Arditti 2008; Escobar 2010; Gudyas, Guevara, and Roque 2008; Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Macdonald and Ruckert 2009; Panizza 2009). This body of work reveals a spectrum of responses to what can be described as “maturing neoliberalism,” from a Bolivian revolution that is framed as a formal rejection of neoliberalism, to Colombia’s deepening recommitment to the full suite of neoliberal social, political, and economic practices.

Where our volume diverges most starkly from this ongoing critical conversation is in the way our case studies lead to a thoroughgoing skepticism about the conventional dichotomies that are used to make sense of social change and contested governance in Latin America: neoliberalism vs. socialism; the Right vs. the Left; indigenous vs. mestizo; national vs. transnational. Instead, we focus on the ways in which a range of unresolved contradictions interconnects various projects for change and resistance to change in Latin America. There is no question that “neoliberalism” remains a powerful discursive framework within which these different moments of crisis and even rupture play out. But our volume suggests that a new ideological landscape is coming into view in Latin America and that it has the potential to dramatically reorient the ways in which social and political change itself is understood, conceptualized, and practiced in the region and beyond.

ILLUMINATING THE PRESENT IN LATIN AMERICA

The present in Latin America is marked by both extraordinary moments of social, political, and economic experimentation and moments of violent resistance and retrenchment. And yet the case studies in this volume resist most of the easy dialectics that have provided analytical cover for those who seek to encompass Latin America within the grand and all-too-often reductive sweep. If it is true, as Walter Mignolo (2005b) argues, that the space of “Latin America” must be apprehended first and foremost as a contested idea, then it is also true that there are multiple strategies for illuminating this ever-shifting and highly fraught idea. We agree with Mignolo that the integrative geospatial concept of “Latin America” remains relevant and indeed, over the last decade, has been even more so. However, we also believe that the kind of coherence Mignolo urges can be understood only through close engagement with actual points of crisis, from the grand (the “refounding” of Bolivia through constitutional reform) to the less visible (the creation of local development alternatives in rural Colombia), from the urban and deeply national (the emergence of a new class of working poor in Chile’s cities) to the transnational (the construction of transborder policing strategies between El Salvador and the United States). As Perreault and Martin suggest, neoliberalism produces locally specific and scalar expressions (2005).

For the remainder of this chapter, we draw together the collective lessons from the book’s chapters. Taken together, they demonstrate that Latin America has emerged over the last twenty years as a leading edge of social, political, and economic possibility at the same time that specific regions and countries of Latin America reflect the intractability of a range of historical legacies of structural vulnerability. Indeed, the case studies in the volume illuminate the ways in which the currents of neoliberalism create new forms of contestation while simultaneously choking off other possible ideologies and programs for radical social change. This means that in contemporary Latin America, real challenges to the “neoliberal world order” coexist with and even reinforce enduring patterns of exploitation and violence.

Fractured tectonics

In the postscript to the volume, Contreras Natera argues that the disjunctions of the present in Latin America are the result of a prevailing condition

he characterizes as “fractured tectonics.” What he means is that the contemporary examples of experimentation and contestation in contemporary Latin America are closely entwined with both previously and actually existing ideologies and exploitative practices they seek to overcome. This is not a simple dialectics, however, since the relationship between what he calls “insurgent imaginaries” and their hegemonic antitheses is both variable within different regions and histories of Latin America and much less predictably unstable. Even in the most self-consciously revolutionary nations of Latin America, namely Venezuela and Bolivia, the discursive frame is in fact quite ambiguous since the clarion call for radical social change is at least in part dependent on the language and logics of existing frameworks of governance, economic relations, and social and cultural practices.

In order to understand these multiple fractured tectonics empirically, we must adopt an archaeological methodology that seeks to reveal the ways in which these insurgent frames interpenetrate the national neoliberalisms whose legacies suggest their own contradictions and possibilities. Indeed, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate, the essential task of the critical observer of contemporary Latin America is to clear a path among the rubble that is created when these discursive layers shift, often violently, in order to answer more fundamental questions: What really *are* the meaningful challenges to neoliberalism now? Are they in the melding of human rights discourse with revolutionary socialism, as in Bolivia? Are they in the more gradualist and compromising constitutional reforms of Ecuador? Or are they in the hybrid socialist anti-imperialist nationalism of Chávez’s Bolivarian Venezuela? Conversely, does the conservative neoliberal deepening in Peru, Chile, Colombia, and much of Central America, including Mexico, stand apart from the processes of insurgence elsewhere, or does it, in a sense, bracket them?

Moreover, as David Gow (Chapter 4) illustrates, examples of challenges to the hegemony of maturing neoliberalism in Latin America can be found on very small scales indeed, even within a state like Colombia, whose majority politics have, for the time being, definitively rejected the possibility of something like a Bolivian refoundation. Moreover, although the constitutionalist reform moment of the early 1990s seems like a distant memory now, Gow’s study points to the development of modest alternatives in the interstices between the summarizing discursive frame of the nation-state and the equally expansive—though now perhaps fatally compromised—ideology of

the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Interstitial challenges like these are usually ignored or obscured, yet their meanings and importance can, as here, be illuminated by the ethnographic spotlight.

Neoliberal contradictions

Within colonial societies, domination was framed by discourses of race in which indigenous peoples were considered either dangerous savages or children in need of stewardship (Hall 1996). Moreover, throughout the colonial period, tensions in extractive and plantation forms of accumulation produced conflict, as indigenous and slave communities periodically resisted their structural oppression (James 1989; Serulnikov 2003; Stern 1993; Thomson 2002).

These contradictions were not resolved by the formal end of colonialism in Latin America in the first part of the nineteenth century. As they pushed for independence from Spain and Portugal, Creole elites adopted the liberal ideas of the European Enlightenment. Anxious to break with coercive forms of governance and social control, the new Republican states sought liberal solutions to the tensions underlying colonialism, especially the constant threat of ethnic mobilization. As Brooke Larson argues in the case of Andean elites, the effort to recreate colonial societies in terms of liberalism faced a fundamental paradox: mestizo elites looked to “impose universal definitions of free labor and citizenship, as well as to mold national cultures into homogenous wholes (along Eurocentric ideals), while creating the symbols and categories of innate difference in order to set the limits on those ‘universalistic’ ideals” (Larson 2004, 13). The goal, she suggests, was to “build an apparatus of power that simultaneously incorporated and marginalized peasant political cultures in the forced march to modernity” (ibid., 15).

Liberalism promised universal belonging, yet it was accompanied by a new form of race thinking that merely reorganized “colonial hierarchies subordinating Indianness . . . to the Creole domain of power, civilization, and citizenship” (Larson 2004, 14; see also Mehta 1997). Thus, the promises of liberalism were never completely fulfilled, as indigenous groups and peoples of African descent were denied full participation in the political, economic, and cultural life of the new Republican nation-states. In the process, what we might describe as a Latin American liberalism emerged from regimes of exclusion that cut along racial, ethnic, and intraregional lines and then took root. In his postscript, Contreras Natera describes this contradiction as the

result of “the colonial-modern logos,” the dominant epistemological and discursive framework for ordering social relations in the wider colonial world.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, various responses to the paradoxical exclusions of liberalism have marked Latin American history and politics (see Goodale 2009; Postero 2007). At the turn of the twentieth century, the Zárata Willka rebellion in Bolivia reprised the insurgencies of the previous century, demonstrating that indigenous demands for land and autonomy had still not been met (Egan 2007; Rivera Cusicanqui 1987). Populist revolutions, such as those in Mexico (1910), Bolivia (1952), Cuba (1959), and Nicaragua (1979), brought to the surface the still-simmering tensions over unequal land tenure and deepening class divisions (Hale 1994; Klein 1992; Knight 1990). By the 1960s and 1970s, decades of development efforts had failed to increase the standards of living for the majority of Latin Americans, and the need to address structural inequalities through agrarian reform and the redistribution of national resources took on new urgency.

In some countries, popularly elected governments—like Allende’s in Chile—undertook these reforms. In others—like Peru, El Salvador, and Guatemala—communist social movements in the vernacular resisted liberal reforms and instead pursued revolutionary guerrilla war and the politics of structural transformation in terms of a theory of history marked by cycles of conflict (Degregori 1990; Stern 1998; Stoll 1993; Wood 2003). Many of these movements were in turn violently disrupted by a wave of military dictatorships that swept across the region in the 1970s and 1980s. The end of the Cold War brought this phase of violent revolution and reprisal to a close, and most Latin American countries made the transition to formal democracy. Nevertheless, as the chapters in this volume reveal in different ways, the twinned legacies of revolutionary struggle and the violence of state repression continue to shape arguments for and against alternative models of social change and forms of governance in contemporary Latin America.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the crystallization of neoliberalism as the dominant economic and political paradigm. As David Harvey argues:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to

create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (Harvey 2005, 2)

In other words, neoliberal governance assumes that the state has a key role to play in capitalist accumulation by diffusing market logics throughout society. This process has taken different forms across Latin America. Elana Zilberg's contribution to this volume (Chapter 9) underscores the violence that often accompanies the diffusion of market logics. She describes the contexts of these struggles as "neoliberal securityscapes" and examines the ways in which unruly outliers are both constructed and disciplined in these ambiguous social and political spaces.

Neoliberalism in Latin America is also constituted through "market democracy," a "purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations" (Peck and Tickell 2002, 384). This form of governance emphasizes technocratic administration and the passing of the responsibility for governing from the state to local actors and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Scholars have argued that a central element of neoliberal governance is the encouragement of a civic identity in which individuals are urged to take responsibility for their own behavior and welfare (Foucault 1991a; Rose 1996; Postero 2007; Rudnykyj 2009). Veronica Schild (Chapter 8) argues that, in Chile, these forms of governmentality are visible through two expressions of what she calls an "enabling state." First, the "caring state" targets subjects—especially poor women—and teaches them to be responsible citizens who are able to stand up and make their rights count, exercise their choices as consumers and workers, and make demands upon the state for support in health, pensions, and education. Second, the "punitive state" disciplines those workers who do not comply or who are deemed dangerous.

Legacies of difference and exclusion

Historical legacies of difference and exclusion continue to shape the experiences and consequences of neoliberalism in Latin America. As Patrick Wilson argues, neoliberalism in Latin America continues to be intertwined with racist social and state practices and stubborn ideologies of modernizations and progress (2008, 139). There are several implications of this specific history in the present. First, where a legacy of ethnic or racial exclusion exists, this exac-

erbates the social costs of neoliberal policies and can come to ground movements of resistance. Second, groups with strong cultural identities can use them as resources for formulating alternatives to neoliberalism. Finally, where subversive discourses of ethnicity or race explicitly frame projects for social change, this heightens existing economic or political conflicts and increases the chances that these conflicts will spiral into cycles of deep social crisis or violence.

In Chapter 2, Postero examines the ways in which neoliberal reforms were extended in Bolivia in the mid-1980s under President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, whose government privatized state-owned enterprises, slashed social services, and lowered barriers to foreign capital and commodities. The result was increased unemployment, especially of miners; a massive migration from rural areas to the cities, as farming became unsustainable; and greater poverty. This period also saw growing organization and activism by indigenous and peasant groups, who linked their ethnically articulated demands for territory and recognition to the social consequences of neoliberal policies.

The Bolivian economic reforms were also paired with a set of neoliberal multicultural reforms that encouraged participation at the municipal level. Even though racism frustrated indigenous efforts to force the redistribution of significant resources, indigenous activists were able to take advantage of the political reforms to form their own political parties and to begin articulating alternative proposals based on their own cultures and *cosmovisiones*, or world-views. In 2005, after five years of protests by a population exhausted by the effects of neoliberalism, Bolivians elected their first self-identifying indigenous president, Evo Morales. Postero argues that the powerful discursive link between antineoliberalism and decolonialization has served to legitimate the MAS (Movement Toward Socialism) government's agenda to its indigenous constituents despite ongoing resource extraction on indigenous lands and neoliberal engagement with the global market.

David Gow's study of an indigenous local government in Colombia likewise reveals the importance of ethnicity in framing responses to neoliberalism. Gow explains how struggles during the Constituent Assembly of 1991, increasingly militant indigenous and campesino organizing in the following decade, and the political participation of recently demobilized guerrillas all combined to enable an indigenous governor to take power in the Colombian

department of Cauca and push for a participatory development project that provided a hopeful alternative to the neoliberal (and corrupt) status quo. This case study reinforces the perhaps obvious but nevertheless important point that responses to neoliberalism take root within particular social and political landscapes. In this particular region of Colombia, a long and successful history of indigenous and peasant organizing within a broad coalition of actors created the preconditions for the formation of a new model of local and regional governance.

Neoliberal violence

In Chapter 9, Elana Zilberg argues that the specter of the Cold War enemy of the state, the Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) guerrilla, continues to haunt neoliberal El Salvador in a new form: the transnational gangster-as-terrorist. The social fear of this transfigured enemy of the neoliberal state has allowed the Salvadoran government to adopt draconian security and policing regulations inspired by the United States. Even more, this transnational state of exception has allowed Salvadoran elites to continue to benefit from their support of the United States and its military and economic interests in the region. In Chapter 4, David Gow likewise demonstrates that even when Colombian activists are able to formulate clear—if local—alternatives to the state's neoliberal agenda, their ability to sustain such structural alternatives is much diminished in a context of institutional state violence.

Violence also shapes the ways in which memory and history are subject to reinterpretation within neoliberalism. As Chris Krupa explains in Chapter 7, the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, has used a newly uncovered history of neoliberal violence to support his transition to a “postneoliberal” epoch. Formed by Correa just three months after taking office, Ecuador's truth commission was given the curious charge of investigating human rights abuses committed twenty-five years earlier. The commission's extensive research exposed a public secret lurking in Ecuador's past: that during the early years of the administration of Ecuador's neoliberal “founding father,” President León Esteban Febres-Cordero, the government unleashed a wave of terror, first against a small and largely symbolic guerrilla organization and then against all perceived opponents of the regime. Krupa argues that the revelation of this violent past was a necessary complication of Ecuador's reputation as an

“island of peace” in the region, but he also draws attention to the effects this historical reconstruction is having in the present moment of social change. The commission’s investigations construct a richly analytic narrative that folds Ecuador’s broader experience of neoliberalism into the violence used to institutionalize it—marking the period with indisputable evidence of its consequences right when support for an oppositional agenda was most needed by the Correa government.

Similarly, Veronica Schild (Chapter 8) argues that, in Chile, neoliberal actors beyond the state deploy a kind of symbolic violence in the way their work redefines acceptable categories of subjects by targeting certain behaviors and punishing others. She examines how feminist NGOs single out poor women for intervention and urge them to become responsible consumers and service workers in Chile’s globalized capitalist economy. Those who succeed receive aid; those who do not are punished and left to be swept into the growing private prison system. At a broader level, Zilberg shows how neoliberal categories of inclusion and exclusion, which depend on particular understandings of legal and illegal subjectivity, circulate transnationally between El Salvador and the United States. “Illegal aliens,” deportees, and gang youth are, in a sense, essential to the purposes of a transnational zero-tolerance policing regime that punishes those who defy neoliberal logics of individual responsibility.

*Patterns of accumulation and exploitation
within and beyond neoliberalism*

The chapters in the volume also reveal to different degrees the ways in which particular regimes of accumulation affect the production of responses to neoliberalism in Latin America and are reworking class relations in the process.

In Colombia, Gow argues, indigenous activists who have struggled for decades to obtain land rights now have sufficient class legitimacy to capture governing positions and push for indigenous notions of development. In Ecuador, the *hacendado* class has been transformed into a new political and economic elite through ownership of nontraditional export processes, while their former indigenous *peones* have become the new working class. The old contradictions of race and land are now being debated through the idiom of citizenship, often in harsh and sometimes violent ways.

The Chilean and Salvadoran cases also uncover new class struggles. Schild describes the transformation of the Chilean economy under neoliberalism, where industrialization based on cheap labor and increased consumption destroyed rural production and produced a new class of urban poor. Moreover, as Zilberg explains, in the transnational circuit between the United States and El Salvador, a postwar economy dependent on transnational global market relations produced new categories of neoliberal subjects: poor migrants, service workers, and “gang youth.” At the U.S. border, those migrants become “illegal aliens” and “disposable people” subject to state violence (Green 2011). Yet, those same forces have also produced a new transnational class of migrant entrepreneurs who return to their countries of origin to wield much more political and economic power than they could have prior to immigrating (see also Pedersen 2012).

Shifting categories of class also reorient the relationships of other actors working for social change. In her chapter on NGOs in Mexico, Analiese Richard (Chapter 6) argues that NGOs are often either criticized for being “Trojan horses” for market-oriented forms of subjectivity and social action or celebrated as incubators of democratic values and practices. However, this dichotomy ignores the complexity of the specific political and social terrains these civil-society actors inhabit. Richard traces the historical development of the NGO sector in Tulancingo, Mexico, and reveals important contradictions between the class orientation of the organizations’ founders and their populist aims, as well as strong connections between NGOs and political elites. She argues that, as a result, Mexican NGOs have been forced to negotiate with a variety of actors within and beyond the state in their own quest to be “taken into account” in policy decisions that affect them and their constituents; this, she maintains, in turn profoundly limits the capacity of local NGOs to openly challenge the neoliberal model. Schild makes a related argument about feminist NGO workers in Chile. She suggests that the neoliberal reforms of the past twenty years have resulted in the restoration of capitalist class power and control. One troubling effect of this has been the morphing of many on the Left into what we might call “the managerial Left”—those concerned more with pragmatic politics than with earlier agendas of sweeping social change.